



NEWS

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Two U.S. Wetlands Nominated as Wetlands of International Importance

The United States is nominating its 16th and 17th Wetlands of International Importance under the Convention on Wetlands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark announced today. Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota and Bolinas Lagoon near San Francisco, California will become the newest additions signifying the importance this country places on wetlands conservation. To date, 907 sites worldwide have been designated under the convention.

Announcing the nominations in conjunction with International Migratory Bird Week, Clark said, "The continued loss of wetlands throughout the world poses a serious threat to both wildlife and people. When wetlands disappear, essential habitat for waterfowl and other species of animals and plants also disappear. For people, wetland losses lead to declines in water quantity and quality, and increased flood risk."

Located near Columbia, South Dakota, the 22,000-acre Sand Lake National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1935 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. Sand Lake will be the only Wetlands Convention site within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Area, a subdivision of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

A large freshwater cattail marsh, it provides critical nesting and staging habitat for many different bird species. The number of migrating waterfowl using the large wetland complex often exceeds 20,000 and includes such birds as mallards, wood ducks and Canada geese. Sand Lake is also important habitat for reptiles, amphibians, fish, and mammals, contributing to global biodiversity.

"Thousands of people from birdwatchers to anglers and hunters to hikers to school groups visit Sand Lake refuge each year," said Clark. "Its popularity for outdoor recreation gives the Service and its partners a great opportunity to help refuge visitors understand how wetlands impact their lives." Refuge staff, working in partnership with various state agencies, private organizations, and other federal agencies, conducts wetlands education programs for area schools as well as outreach in conjunction with various state tourism efforts.

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Bolinas Lagoon, on the south end of California's Point Reyes peninsula, is managed by the Marin County Open Space District. One of that county's most significant natural resources, it is a critical staging ground and stopover for migratory birds. As the first wetland on the Pacific Flyway in the lower 48 states to be nominated, the 1,100-acre site's open water, mudflat, and marsh provide productive and diverse habitat for marine fishes, mammals, and waterbirds.

"This nomination is a tribute to the citizens of Marin county who recognized the value of protecting such an ecological treasure," said Clark. "Because the wetland is so near a major urban and popular tourist area, it is easy for people to visit. They can see for themselves a great example of how wetlands support a diversity of wildlife."

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, more commonly known as the Ramsar Convention after its place of adoption in Iran in 1971, is the only international agreement dedicated to the worldwide protection of a particular type of ecosystem. Currently 108 nations embrace the treaty's goal to stem the loss of wetlands. Because many wetland habitats span international boundaries and many wetland species are migratory, Ramsar countries not only are dedicated to preserving wetlands within their own borders by supporting wetland management, research, and training programs and by public outreach initiatives, but they also work together to ensure the health of wetlands globally.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages 512 national wildlife refuges covering 92 million acres, as well as 67 national fish hatcheries. It also enforces federal wildlife laws, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat, administers the Endangered Species Act, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.